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"THE JOLLY TOPER"
BY JUDITH LEYSTER OF HAARLEM
In the Rijk's Museum, Amsterdam

(See next page)

JUDITH LEYSTER, A FEMALE FRANS HALS

BY FRIEDA VAN EMDEN

WOMAN Suffrage in support of its cause has drawn attention to the achievement of women throughout the ages.

It is a curious fact that JUDITH LEYSTER of Haarlem has been overlooked, never having received the homage due her as the first woman painter in the Netherlands of real importance. Here is a woman highly honored during her lifetime but so completely forgotten after her death that it has even been hard to trace the history of her life.

Judith Leyster was the contemporary and fellow-citizen of Frans Hals and the Dutch painters of his time; she came

under his influence most of all, in fact so much, that her style of work resembles his to the point of confusion. Though she is never mentioned officially as one of his pupils, undoubtedly she studied under him. The casual observer looking at one of her paintings will smile as one is wont to smile at the roguish types chosen by Frans Hals and never doubt but that he does see a Hals! Solemn experts used to pronounce them to be genuine works of Hals, thereby tripling their value. The Netherlanders of her time, and even more so the later generations, were quick to note the striking and confusing resemblance. Every one

of her pictures has been known as a Hals for a shorter or a longer period. To change her monogram to his was a comparatively easy matter. Some owners, convinced that they possessed a painting by the great Haarlem master, may have meant it for an honest rectification. More often it has been a cold-blooded cheat. Especially as Frans Hals's *genre* pieces began to win renewed favor, it is plain that greed did not hesitate to cunningly add some convenient lines to her easily changed signature.

No greater praise can be given her work than the very fact that it could be passed off for his with such facility.

Undoubtedly it has his qualities: there is nothing labored about it; each figure seems as if done in one sitting and the likeness must have been splendid. Judith Leyster may not always have drawn with quite the masterly correctness of Hals, but like him she arranges her subject so cleverly that she avoids all suspicion of tiresome posing. Unwomanly, she does not dwell on detail—big lines, big effects, fresh coloring.

During the last half of the nineteenth century Judith Leyster, who was then but a myth, was re-discovered. One by one, through restoring and by

careful investigation, her signatures have come to light again. As late as 1893 a painting called "The Duet" was the cause of a lawsuit in England. It had been sold at a high figure as a Hals and was discovered to be a Leyster. Yet there was documentary evidence to show that the painting had been known as a Hals for over two hundred years.

One marvels at her work, especially if one thinks of the age in which Judith Leyster lived. Contemplating in her paintings the broad and easy sweep of the brush and the sure touch, we get a mental picture of a very independent young woman. This she must have been, for in staid Old-



"THE JEWELLER"
BY JUDITH LEYSTER

Holland of the early part of the seventeenth, when a woman could only be a spinster or some one's housewife, it must have been extraordinarily difficult for a young girl to follow a vocation. How we regret to know so little about Judith Leyster's life!

Not even the year of her birth is known. She must have been born shortly after 1600, and we know that she died in 1660. Her parents probably came originally from Zaandam. We presume that she had three sisters and two brothers, as she is mentioned with them in old papers as sharing in the estate of a great-grand-uncle. To Judith the good things of this earth, everything an artist could

wish for—fame and appreciation—must have come early in life. In a rhymed chronicle of the city of Haarlem as early as 1628 Samuel Ampzing praises her, and he voices the common awe when he exclaims: "Who ever heard of a woman painter?" Still, she must also have suffered, because for a woman to be "different" then was far more of a stigma than it is now. Another writer of the times, the historian of Haarlem, Schrevelius, gallantly calls her in a word-play on her name: *loodster* amongst the painters ("*leiden*" is the Dutch verb for "to guide," while "*ster*" is star). In her signature she uses a star as a rebus for the last syllable of her name, a not uncommon way in those days of expressing a signature by punning or "canting" figures.

Her big triumph came in 1633; she was admitted to the Saint Lucas Gild, the painters' guild of Haarlem. This important body must have taken the grave step of changing its constitution in order to admit a woman. For a woman, even a Judith Leyster, to gain admittance to the circle of Frans Hals and his followers was nothing short of a miracle, and proclaims that she was a painter of such talent that the men had to bow and admit it. In 1635 she is mentioned as being the teacher of one "Willem Wouters."

In 1636 and therefore not in her first youth, Judith married a painter named Jan Miense Molenaer. Though she is now officially the housewife of Molenaer yet she follows the custom of the times in using her old signature. From then on we only can find mention of her name twice. Once she transacts some business for her husband, signing her name to a deed. The second and last time her name appears is on the printed invitations to her funeral in 1660. This is all the positive knowledge we have of her. Her husband eclipsed her entirely. Following his life we may attempt to reconstruct the record of hers.

As she was a woman, the first question asked will probably be: "Was she good looking"? If she was, certainly she was not vain, for no self-portrait of her is known, whereas most artists of that period and Molenaer also indulged in several. If so be that, as Bode and Bredius presume, she is the young woman who frequently appears in her husband's works, notable in his "Dentist" and "Breakfast" she must have been a very agreeable and average Dutch type. Besides, to judge from the subjects of his works, the gay seigneur Jan Miense

Molenaer was not exactly the type of man to marry a plain-looking woman. He was a great favorite with the patrician families and though only a painter of the second rank, was honored with many orders for portraits of notables. In his many *genre* pictures so typical of the Dutch school he paints in rather small figures the lower classes and the peasantry in their every-day life. He is very humorous, but some of his subjects were even too crude for the taste of his contemporaries—and this is saying much!

Shortly after their marriage they moved to Amsterdam, where they both could not fail to feel Rembrandt's influence, for he was just then at the zenith of his popularity. In

some of Judith's lately discovered portraits of that period this is plainly visible, though she remains above all distinctly the pupil of Frans Hals. In 1648 they went back to Haarlem where they bought a place in the suburb of Heemstede, thereby realizing the dream of every Dutchman, namely, to spend the declining years of his life at a residence of his own in the country. The names given to such places as "Free from Care," "Never Expected," "Well Satisfied," etc., are typical of the existing bourgeois sentiment. At their place, called "Het Lam," Judith Leyster Molenaer passed away in 1660. She is buried in Heemstede, but her grave is not known to-day. The sending out by the



"THE MUSICIAN"—RIJK COLLECTION, AMSTERDAM
BY JUDITH LEYSTER

bereaved husband of the printed invitations, in one is requested to join the funeral cortège as a friend, is proof positive of their prosperity. She does not seem to have had any children.

A Dutch custom demands attention which we find existing in New York also down to 1740. Art dealers held big lotteries of paintings and other art objects, instead of sales, thus catering to the gambling spirit among a people of merchants. As we know that Molenaer worked for one of these lottery dealers, being commissioned to deliver paintings to the amount of several hundred guilders, we assume that his wife also occasionally disposed of her work in that manner, perhaps together with her husband. In all probability Judith Leyster was very productive, though no more than an odd dozen of her paintings is known to-day. After the changes to better-known names which her signature seems to have undergone, and on account of the probable collaboration with her husband, some of her works will undoubtedly always remain sailing under false flags. Although few of her paintings bear dates, it seems to be a fact that womanlike she did her best work before marriage.

As to her subjects, they are just as typical as those of Frans Hals: she seems to have done little portrait work on commission. She profited by Hals'

lucky find of the picturesqueness of his life-sized, happy-go-lucky drinkers, smokers and musicians. These free and easy subjects of Hals have contributed as much to his fame as his portraits and corporation pieces. Again, as is often the case with women, Judith Leyster is so intense that she is sometimes *plus royaliste que le roi*, more Frans Hals than Frans Hals, as for instance in her masterpiece "The Jolly Toper" [Amsterdam Ryksmuseum] of her early period (1629). The coloring is extremely lively but has faded; the face shows red blood and the composition is masterly.

Sometimes she seems to have repeated herself, using the same subject twice, not always with the same success. However, when at her best, Judith Leyster is to be classed with the great Dutch painters. For mercenary reasons later generations conveniently effaced nearly all traces of her existence. That her works helped swell the fame of no less a master than Frans Hals is her greatest distinction and the best proof of the virile nature of her work. In *genre* painting it puts her on a par with him.

Judith Leyster of Haarlem, housewife of Jan Miense Molenaer, is a remarkable figure in the world of art and one to which her sex can point not without pride.

Frieda van Emden

THE SWORD OF LA FAYETTE*

(Inscribed to Raymond Poincaré, President of the French Republic)

It was the time of our despair,
When lion-hearted Washington—
That man of patience and of prayer—
Looked sadly at each rising sun.
In all the freedom-breeding air,
Of hope and rescue there was none.
When lo!—as down from Heaven let,
There came the sword of La Fayette!

Our harbors—how they danced with light!
Our tireless bells—how they did ring!
Again we girded up to fight
Not England, but her Prussian king.
For here was succor, and the might
Of one great soul's imagining . . .
What wonder if our eyes be wet
To see the sword of La Fayette!

Upon the walls where Justice keeps
The swords she doth most gladly save,
Not one of all so deeply sleeps
Within the scabbard's honored grave
But, listening for her call, it leaps
To live again among the brave.
Thank Heaven our naked blade is set
Beside the sword of La Fayette!

Not his, not ours, the brutal strife,
The vulgar greed of soil or dross;
The feet that follow drum and fife
Shall tread to nobler gain or loss.
'T is for the holiness of life
The Spirit calls us to the Cross.
Forget us, God, if we forget
The sacred sword of La Fayette.

Robert Underwood Johnson

* Read at the celebration of "France Day," April 26, 1917, at the College of the City of New York.

